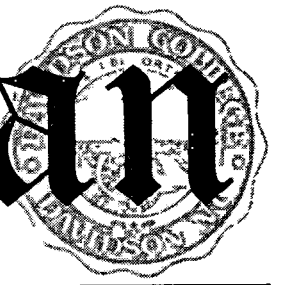


The Davidsonian

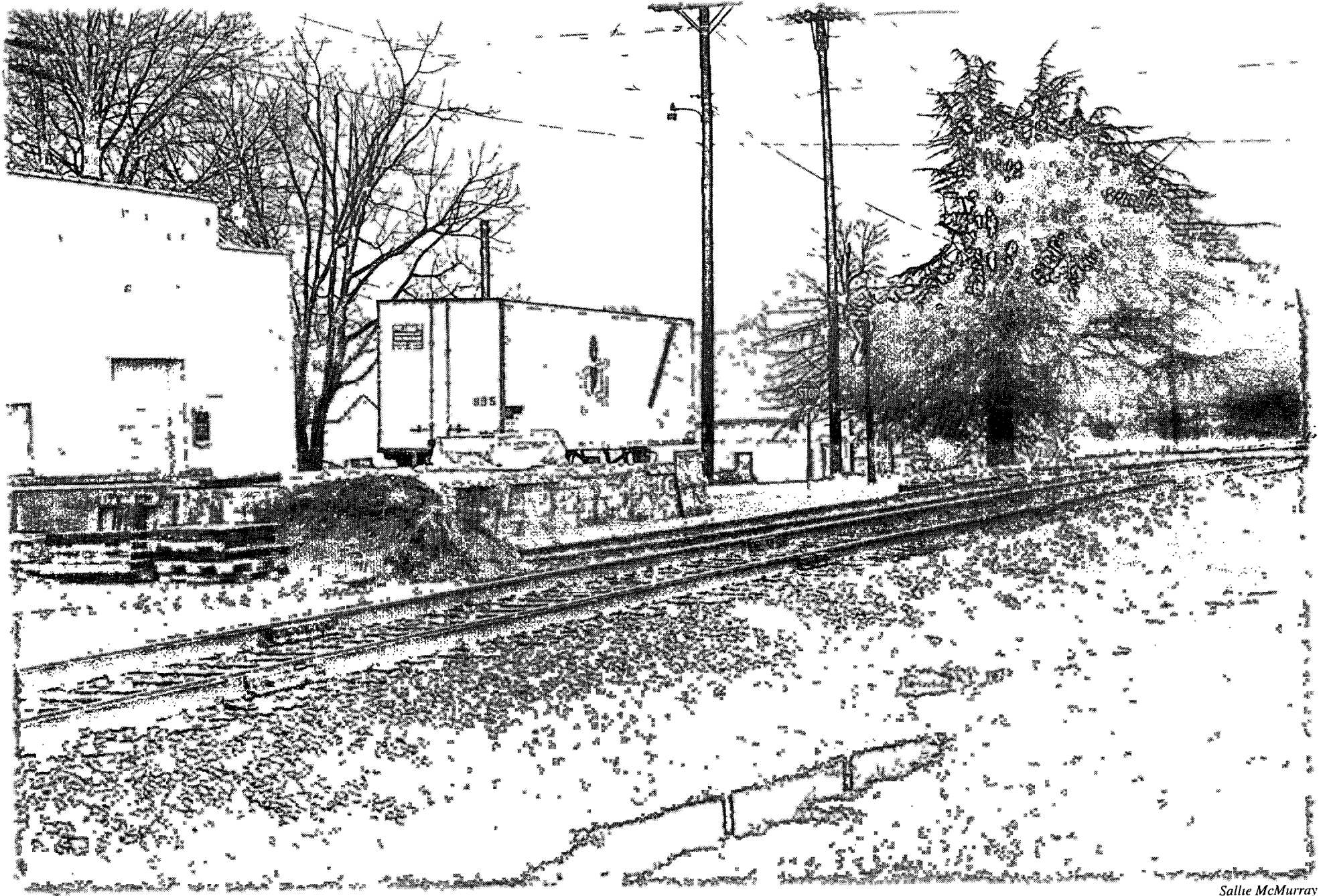
SPECIAL FEATURE



DAVIDSON COLLEGE

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 1998

A shot through the heart of a community



Sallie McMurray

THE HISTORY

The creation of a dividing line

By MELISSA DE CASTRIQUE
Staff Writer

Technology changes daily. Today, any Davidson students armed with a web browser, an ethernet connection, and curious minds can have the world at their fingertips without even leaving their rooms. As an article in the November 1860 North Carolina Presbyterian stated, "Davidson will be...in constant communication with the outer world." This writer was not predicting the information superhighway over 100 years in advance, however. Davidson's worldly connection in 1860 was due to the new railroad.

Before the railroad was finished in 1861, transportation was limited to the Plank Road, which ran north to south through the town of Davidson. This

line of eight-foot long wooden planks was considered the wave of the future in the 1850s, so the arrival of the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio Railroad Company was a welcome and exciting change.

The original tracks did not survive the Civil War, but were relaid in 1871. The day that train service was restored, the entire community celebrated by waving flags and cheering. The excitement of students and community members alike was expressed by the June 1871 Davidson Monthly, which declared, "We...are no longer shut out from the rest of creation."

Davidson's link to the outside world was celebrated elsewhere. The Davidson Monthly editors of 1871 told readers of the "Grand Free Ride" to Charlotte, which included not only a free hour-long ride to Charlotte, but the

chance to hear speeches about the railroad's importance. The article reinforced the rarity of such an occasion by telling readers, "In regard to the ride, we only have this to say, that it is the last free one we expect to take unless it is on a voyage to the moon."

Although the latest word from NASA is that moon travel is hardly free, the sentiments of these train travelers were understood.

The excitement of technological progress and the options it creates were not taken for granted by the first travelers on Davidson's railroad. This excitement should serve as an example to Davidson students to revel in and take advantage of the amazing opportunities available over 130 years after the introduction of the railroad to the town of Davidson.